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RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DUSHANBE 000514

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 4/27/2019

TAGS: PREL EFIN ASEC CVIS PHUM EAID TI

SUBJECT: MIFFED ABOUT INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND VOTE, TAJIK FOREIGN MINISTER VENTS

REF: A) DUSHANBE 508 B) DUSHANBE 310 C) DUSHANBE 48

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CLASSIFIED BY: TRACEY A JACOBSON, AMBASSADOR, EXE, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: With the Tajik government highly annoyed that the United States dared to oppose a new IMF loan, Foreign Minister Zarifi called in the Ambassador April 27, accompanied by the DCM and RSO. In a departure from normal practice, Zarifi, who is comfortable in both Russian and English, insisted on conducting the meeting in Tajik with interpretation.

Accompanied by a supporting phalanx of staff, he complained not just about the IMF vote, but a long list of grievances, including the U.S. Human Rights Report, U.S. comments on the Religious Freedom Law, the use of "green zone" security territory surrounding the Embassy, Embassy hiring practices and visa issuance, and finally an alleged failure to inform MFA about A/S Boucher's press conference April 21. The tenor of the conversation suggested that the Embassy should deal exclusively with the MFA in all our work, and not use information from ordinary citizens, civil society, or opposition parties in reporting and assessment. Zarifi contended that no third party had any right to take action based on the special audit report of the national bank.

The Ambassador told Zarifi that of course donors would consider the audit report, which should be an impetus to undertake serious economic reform. She welcomed the Minister raising the human rights report as chance to elevate the dialogue on this issue, but noted that we are obliged not only to prepare the report annually, but also to include information from a variety of sources outside government, including civil society and opposition groups. On the Embassy perimeter zone, she secured agreement to delay any immediate action until the June visit of an OBO planning team (ref B and septel). Finally, she laid out the internal controls in our hiring and visa review procedures in detail. The IMF vote was the main substantive issue, but it also provided Zarifi a pretext to demand what he has long wanted -- more control over who we hire, how we work, and what we report back to Washington. End Summary.

Unfriendly Gestures

¶2. (C) As predicted in reftel A, Foreign Minister Zarifi convoked the Ambassador to a meeting to discuss "bilateral relations," in an apparent fit of pique that the United States had dared to oppose a new IMF loan (which was nonetheless approved 23-1 on April 21.) Accompanied by the Head of Diplomatic services, two staff from the North America Desk, the

head of MFA Consular Affairs and the MFA press office as well as an interpreter, Zarifi set an unusually formal tone by conducting the meeting in Tajik with interpretation.

Recognizing that the recently released executive summary of the Ernst & Young Special Audit probably played a factor in our opposition Zarifi claimed that it was not legitimate to use the report as the basis for any kind of decision, and again criticized A/S Boucher's mention of the missing money during his meeting with the President on April 20. He read the audit's disclaimer in full (in Russian) which noted that because so much information was withheld from the auditors or destroyed the numbers therein could not be certified as accurate. Zarifi claimed that the audit therefore could not be considered evidence of any wrongdoing. The Ambassador said that if the audit did not provide proof that anything was stolen, nonetheless it showed that over \$500 million was not properly accounted for, and donors would take that information into consideration in designing future programs for Tajikistan. She offered the Minister the U.S. Treasury statement on its opposition to the loan, but he refused saying he was not interested. He called the no vote an "unfriendly gesture." The Ambassador noted because the United States is a major donor to the IMF and other international financial institutions, we have an obligation to ensure that U.S. taxpayers' funds reach the people who need them and are not diverted for some other purpose. She noted that the United States wants to work with Tajikistan to help its development, including in the energy sector, and that we would continue projects to help improve agriculture and the business environment. We are willing to help facilitate a dialogue with neighbors if that would be useful. But she also noted that improving the management of Tajik's national resources and economic practices were prerequisites for real economic growth, and over the long term, real Tajik sovereignty. Tajikistan will not be able to overcome its reliance on donor funding until it undertakes serious reform, and the audit should be an impetus.

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Human Rights and Religious Freedom

13. (SBU) After the obligatory diplomatic language about the importance of our bilateral relationship and the Minister's satisfaction with the work of the embassy, Zarifi launched into a complaint about the U.S. human rights report, calling it inaccurate and biased and an interference in internal affairs. He said Tajikistan discussed these issues with international organizations but did not recognize it as a valid topic for the bilateral relationship. He complained that Embassy staff had discussed the religion law with Tajik citizens and opposition parties and said if we had concerns we should address them to the government and more specifically to the MFA, and not engage in a "provocative" dialogue with individuals outside of government. He suggested that the United States look to its own problems with human rights, for example Guantanamo and the war in Iraq. The Ambassador noted we were mandated by law to compile the report using the widest variety of sources, both in and outside the government. The more information the government gives us the better the report would be. She noted that human rights in the United States is a broad and constant topic both inside and outside the country, but only through listening to constructive criticism could we hope to make improvements to our policies. She also noted that in our discussions on the election law and religion law, we have not made bilateral recommendations but supported recommendations of international organizations like the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe and United Nations.

¶4. (SBU) Zarifi raised the Embassy's control over the 20 meter perimeter around its compound, known as the "Green Zone," saying that we had no right to this property, had not paid for it, and needed to remove the guard booths and perimeter fence on this property. The Ambassador handed over the diplomatic correspondence on the issue dating back to 2002. The first was a diplomatic note from the United States saying that before entering the lease for Embassy property we requested written agreement that the Embassy would be allowed to control for security purposes a 20 meter perimeter zone. She also offered the MFA's reply noting receipt of our diplomatic note and forwarding a letter from the City administration granting the United States control of that territory. The Minister claimed that the City administration letter was not valid and that only the MFA could approve an agreement with a foreign mission. The Ambassador pointed out that since the MFA sent us the City's letter under the cover of a diplomatic note, we had relied on it as approved by MFA. Zarifi maintained his claim that it was not valid, but agreed to the Ambassador's request, that in view in the recent increase in surveillance of the Embassy, we could wait until a visiting OBO team came in June to discuss the matter before any current structures were removed. The Ambassador also pointed out the Embassy does not use the territory or guard booths, which are rather used by Tajik security staff protecting the Embassy. In view of this the RSO will inform the State Committee for National Security that the current structures might soon be removed. By septel we will be requesting DS and OBO assistance in maintaining embassy security.

Embassy Functions

¶5. (C) Zarifi claimed that the hiring of staff at the U.S. Embassy was controlled by a corrupt regional mafia who hired their friends and relatives. He further claimed that local consular staff arranged visas in exchange for bribes and consulate gave visas to criminals or people escaping child support payments or court cases. The Ambassador acknowledged that she was aware of the rumors about a "hiring mafia" but in fact all hiring was done by Americans with controls in place to ensure local staff could not influence the process. She also described internal controls in the visa process. She noted that there are groups in Tajikistan who tell applicants they can help them get a visa for a fee, so we have a robust public diplomacy effort including media and universities to explain that no one needs to deal with a middleman to get a visa. The Ambassador noted that we had requested the government to share information on criminals and terrorists so we could include them in the database and avoid inadvertently issuing visas to such people.

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She said that the embassy wanted to take Tajik government information into consideration when making visa decisions - real information on court rulings, arrests, etc., would be welcome. However, we cannot refuse a visa based solely on a call from someone inside or outside the government that is not backed up by documentation. She suggested that the MFA adopt a policy along the lines of the State Department's practice of refusing passports to parents in arrears on their child support. (Note: Last year, Zarifi raised one on one with the Ambassador the case of the son of a friend, who had left his first wife and "immigrated illegally to the United States to avoid paying child support." The parents wanted him returned to Tajikistan. Ambassador explained that the individual had a valid marriage according to Tajik law, and also had a valid immigrant visa, and that the embassy could not revoke a visa or deport a legal immigrant on the basis of an oral request). Zarifi asked that the Embassy provide a list of local employees to the Ministry. The Ambassador agreed to provide a list, but noted that we already requested the Ministry to provide a background check on

anyone before we hired them (which led the surprised Minister to check with his staff for confirmation).

¶6. (C) Comment: The IMF vote was the main substantive issue, but it also provided Zarifi a pretext to demand what he has long wanted -- more control over who we hire, how we work, and what we report back to Washington. We suspect there is also a financial incentive - we have heard from the head of diplomatic services that if the MFA can get information that leads to the collection of unpaid taxes (from local employees and landlords, for instance), or rental fees (for example, for the perimeter around the Embassy) then the MFA gets to keep a cut. The Ambassador will be briefing the European Missions about our IMF vote and the Tajik response on April 28.

JACOBSON